UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CONF.91/ INF/23
12 December 1997

ENGLISH ONLY

SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 13-22 January 1998
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

Report on the Toponymic Work in China

Paper submitted by China

* E/CONF.91/1

98-00283 D

TOPONYMIC WORK IN CHINA SINCE THE SIXTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

January 1998

Toponymic work in China is valued and supported by the national and local governments at all levels. The following are some highlights of the progress that has been achieved in that work since the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1992:

1. Toponymic organs

In the course of streamlining the national administrative structure, the State Council decided to transfer the functions of the China Committee on Geographical Names to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Agencies responsible for geographical names at the provincial, municipal and county levels have been incorporated into the government administrative structures at those levels. In order to strengthen scholarly research on toponymy, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has established an Institute for Chinese Toponymic Research which has already begun its work. Preparations are also under way for the establishment of a technical commission on the standardization of Chinese geographical names.

2. Publication of toponymic reference works and setting of standards

The China Committee on Geographical Names has prepared and published the Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo diminglu (A compilation of geographical names in the People's Republic of China) and the Waiguo diming yiming shouce (A handbook for the translation of foreign geographical names), each containing approximately 100,000 entries. The Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo diming dacidian (Encyclopedic dictionary of geographical names in the People's Republic of China), with 180,000 entries and some 20 million characters, will be published soon, while the large-format Zhongua Renmin Gongheguo biaozhun xingzheng guhua diming tuji (Atlas and gazetteer of standard geographical names in the People's Republic of China by administrative division) and the Zhongguo gujin diming dacidian (Encyclopedic dictionary of ancient and modern Chinese geographical names) are in preparation, with publication expected in the year 2000. In addition, authorities of provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have been preparing and publishing books and reference works on local geographical names.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs and the National Bureau of Survey and Mapping have drawn up the Waiguo diming Hanzi yixie guize (Principles of Chinese-character transcription of foreign geographical names), containing principles for transliterating the sounds of place names in the English, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic languages. The National Bureau of Survey and Mapping has also issued the Liyu diming Hanzi yiyin gueize (Principles of Chinese-character transliteration of the Li language) and the Liangshan Yiyu diming Hanzi yiyin guize (Principles of Chinese-character transcription of the Liangshan Yi language). In accordance with the mandate of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, we have completed the transcription of the Glossary of toponymic terminology for the Chinese version.

3. Training in toponomy

Since 1989, 10 training courses have been held at the national level for cadres whose work involves geographical names; a total of 1,100 persons have attended these courses. Starting with basic toponymic concepts, the training covers the standardization, uniform romanization, assignment, changing, administration, investigation and transcription of geographical names, as well as computerized files and databases of such names. Some local geographical name committees have also organized their own courses, which have provided good professional training for personnel involved in toponymic work. Basic toponymic training materials published to date include the Dimingxue gailun (Introduction to toponymy) and Shiyong dimingxue (Practical toponomy), edited by Wang Jitong, and Dimingxue jichu jiaocheng (A basic course in toponomy) by Professor Zhu Yaping.

4. Toponymic databases

In 1993, the National Bureau of Survey and Mapping formally completed a national topographic database and toponymic database based on a 1:1,000,000-scale topographic map; these databases contain nearly 80,000 geographical names of all types. A national toponymic database based on a 1:250,000-scale map is currently in preparation with completion expected in 1998.

5. Scholarly exchanges

Over the past five years, three scholarly conferences on toponomy have been convened at the national level. Topics discussed at these conferences have included the planning and administration of geographical names in coastal cities, the collation of computerized files of geographical names, and the

establishment of toponymic information systems. In March 1994, an international conference of scholars on geographical names in national-minority languages was held in the Xishuangbanna Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province, at which experts from the United Kingdom, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan presented more than 50 papers.

6. Administration of geographical names

The rapid changing and expansion of China's cities are creating a need for more new names for streets and residential districts. In order to ensure the proper use of standardized geographical names, the installation and administration of place-name indicators of all kinds have been strengthened. National standards for all types of urban place-name signs are also being developed. Installation of name markers for small towns and villages along major highways throughout the country was begun in 1996, and the installation of name markers for more than 100,000 such small towns and villages is expected to be completed by the end of 1998.